Ulrich Middeldorf

Thos. Spring Rice Esq.
with the Writer's Compliments

OUTLINES OF A PLAN

FOR THE

NATIONAL ENCOURAGEMENT

OF

Historical Painting

IN THE UNITED KINGDOM.

ORIGINALLY ADDRESSED IN 1809 TO THE DIRECTORS OF THE BRITISH INSTITUTION,

AND NOW RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED TO THE CONSIDERATION OF

LORD JOHN RUSSELL,

HER MAJESTY'S PRINCIPAL SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT,

BY

SIR MARTIN ARCHER SHEE,

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY,
F.R.S.

LONDON:
JAMES RIDGWAY AND SONS, PICCADILLY.
MDCCCXXXVII.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

LORD JOHN RUSSELL, M.P.

ETC. ETC.

My Lord,

The following Letter was written, as your Lordship will perceive, in the year 1809. It originated in a conversation with the late Sir Thomas Bernard and the late Sir George Beaumont, two of the Directors of the British Institution, in which I took the liberty of throwing out some suggestions for rendering more effective the operations of that Society.

Having been assured by those Gentlemen that there was nothing which the Directors desired more than that some specific plan for the encouragement of the Arts should be offered for their consideration, I addressed to that body the Plan which your Lordship will find developed in

the following pages. A proposition founded upon it was, I believe, submitted to the then Prime Minister, Mr. Perceval. That Gentleman, however, as I was informed at the time, after a considerable delay, declined to take any proceeding on the subject, as he did not consider the object in view of sufficient importance to justify the expense required for its attainment.

At the period to which I refer, the country was exhausted by a long and burthensome war; the public mind was engrossed by subjects of the most overwhelming interest, and the Fine Arts had obtained so little general consideration, that no attention could be excited to any topic which related to their concerns, or was connected with their promotion.

At present, the aspect of affairs is fortunately changed. The nation is now at peace, and its interests are, I trust, generally prosperous. The Arts, also, are more justly appreciated; their influence as effective agents of moral and intellectual refinement is universally acknowledged, and the policy of providing for their cultivation recommended by every enlightened class of the

community. Under these circumstances, it seems not unreasonable to suppose that a project directed to that end may be now listened to with more favour, and perhaps attended with more effect.

Impressed with these ideas, and under the influence of revived hopes, some of my Brother Artists have strongly urged upon me the expediency of again attempting to draw the public attention to the following Letter; conceiving that the suggestions which it contains are not less applicable, at the present day, to the state of the Fine Arts, than they were at the period of its original publication, while the remoteness of that period renders it more than probable that the plan in question may have wholly escaped the notice of those on whose liberal character and official influence, the interests of taste must now in a great measure depend for that protection of which they stand so much in need.

In again offering my proposition to the notice of the public, I confess I am far from being confident of its merits, or sanguine as to its reception. But it is said (according to a favourite

argument employed in cases of this sort), that if it should do no good, it can do no harm. It is alleged also, that the time appears propitious for the consideration of such a subject; that the readiness with which large sums have been voted for the purchase of works for the National Collection, decidedly proves that the Government and the Parliament are influenced by no niggardly spirit in such matters, and that an expenditure for the more direct promotion of the Arts would meet with no illiberal opposition from any quarter.

I trust this is a correct estimate of the general feeling. To ascertain what the genius of our country might be able to effect under the application of a proper stimulus, appears to be worth a trial; and the experiment, even if unsuccessful, would reflect credit on any Government.

If my particular views of the subject are erroneous, they may be corrected by wiser counsels which your Lordship cannot fail to find within your reach; if I am officious, your liberality will discover in my position some palliation of the offence. But whatever may be the

result, the same motive which has urged me forward on former occasions, will not allow me now to recede from the adoption of any measure which offers even a possibility of advantage to my profession, and which can be suggested as not only my justification but my duty.

Allow me, therefore, to lay the following pages, most respectfully, before your Lordship as a Nobleman avowedly desirous for the advancement of the Fine Arts, and as a Minister of State, with whose department their interests may be said to be more particularly connected.

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

With great respect,

Your Lordship's faithful, humble Servant,

MARTIN ARCHER SHEE.

Cavendish Square,
Sept. 21, 1837.

A LETTER, &c.

GENTLEMEN,

THE effort which you have made in favor of the fine Arts naturally points you out as the most proper persons to be addressed upon any subject which relates to their interests. I shall, therefore, make no apology for soliciting your attention to the following pages; satisfied, that what is offered with respect, will be received with candour; and that whatever may appear informal or officious in my observations, will be excused in a liberal consideration of the motive which has occasioned them, and the object to which they are directed.

To expatiate on the utility of the fine Arts, or to point out the credit and consideration,

which they are calculated to confer upon a State, would be, on this occasion, not only unnecessary, but impertinent. Your taste and sensibility can justly appreciate the benefits which they bestow; and in a patriotic desire to obtain them for your country must have originated the formation of that establishment over which you preside.

Unfortunately, however, the liberal sentiments upon this subject, which actuate the Members of the British Institution, are but little prevalent with the government, and still less with the people of this kingdom; and to this circumstance it must be ascribed, that in your patriotic designs, you have found no assistance from the one, and no co-operation from the other. To this circumstance it must be attributed, that, while objects of doubtful advantage or transient gratification are pursued by both, at an expense beyond all example or calculation, the objects which you so laudably pursue, and the good effects of which are as permanent as they are important, seem likely to be defeated, for want of funds too trifling to be considered as

a tax, either on the liberality of the public or the income of the State.

Thus it is, that we are poor and parsimonious, only where we might be liberal at the least expense and to the greatest advantage. The Arts are put out of the pale of public generosity, and are the only claimants on our kindness, which are not, even by accident, allowed to profit by that spirit of profusion which overflows in all other directions, and supplies the channels of ordinary and often useless enterprise with a redundancy of means.

A sensibility to the impressions of taste is, indeed, by no means the characteristic of the people of this country. There is perhaps, no similar instance of a great nation, in which, civil culture has been attended with so little of this species of refinement: in which the Arts have excited so little public interest and obtained so little public estimation. That description of people amongst us, which can be considered, as casting even a thought upon them, is less numerous than could be well believed, by a stranger to our manners and pursuits, and may be

divided into three classes. The first, and by many degrees the largest portion, have no respect whatever for the Arts, for they have no knowledge of their powers, and no idea of their influence. Engaged in the busy pursuits of trade and politics—engrossed by the various modes of making a figure or a fortune, which those important occupations supply, they consider pictures and statues but as trifling ornaments—as useless and expensive luxuries; and cannot conceive the policy of cultivating with any solicitude, objects, whose beauty they are not sufficiently refined to feel, and whose utility is beyond their sagacity to discover.

The second class is made up of those, who, without any real taste or sensibility, are not unwilling to be thought to possess those qualities. They are disposed to admit the importance of the Arts, of which they have read a little, and perhaps, heard a great deal: but, impressed with certain commercial notions, they would regulate the powers of genius by the principles of trade, and cultivate the Arts like a common manufacture. Having long applauded bounties

and protections where they are absurd and pernicious, they would withhold them where they are politic and essential; and perverting a right principle in a wrong application, would leave the Arts to find their level in a market, where there are none to purchase or appreciate their productions; where their influence is unfelt, and their utility unknown.

It must be observed also, that the utility which is conceded to the Arts by this class of reasoners, is restricted to the most obvious and vulgar bounds. They consider them, only as operating on the manufactures and commerce of a country—as contributing improvement to convenience, and polish to luxury—as enabling us to excel our neighbours in the productions of our looms and the taste of our furniture. The moral influence of the Arts is entirely out of their contemplation. Their power over the minds and manners of mankind, makes no item in the gross estimate they have formed of their value. Their operation, as exciting to patriotism and alluring to virtue—as the stimulus and the reward of the sage and the hero—as promoting

the true greatness and perpetuating the real glory of a people; all these considerations, which are the first and most important in an enlightened view of the fine Arts, are never taken into the scale of vulgar computation, and are treated as the utopian reveries of enthusiastic taste and fanciful refinement.

The two classes above mentioned, consisting principally of the better orders of society, include a greater proportion than is perhaps, to be found in any other country, of those, from whose rank, station and education, more enlightened ideas might reasonably be expected.

The third and last class of the division, which a consideration of the public sentiment on the subject of the Arts, has here occasioned, is small indeed: for it consists of those who have real taste and unaffected feeling; of those who respect the Arts from a conviction of their importance, as well as a sense of their attractions; who know them to be as useful as they are ornamental; who are enlightened enough to see how far their moral transcend their mechanical effects; that they are as conducive to virtue and happiness, as

to splendor and power, and not more essential to the present reputation, than to the future fame of their country.

That so few are impressed by these sentiments, in a nation where liberal notions on every other subject are so prevalent, is one of those phenomena of society, which might well merit to be investigated, if the discussion were not inconsistent with the limits prescribed to the present letter.

It is impossible, however, to forbear a passing expression of regret, that the Arts are not allowed to partake of the general prosperity which distinguishes other pursuits; that they are not suffered to keep pace, in the general estimation, with objects which do not better merit to be esteemed; and, above all, it is impossible to avoid lamenting, that so many of our countrymen can become philosophers, men of science, men of letters, and men of fortune, without acquiring or desiring a taste for those pursuits, which philosophy teaches us to prize, as the fairest fruits of civil culture; for pursuits, to which science owes such important obliga-

tions, and upon which she must still depend for so many aids; pursuits, which learning proves to have been the admiration of the enlightened and liberal of all ages, and which fortune would enable them to enjoy and encourage, with so much virtuous gratification to themselves, and permanent advantage to their country.

Of the small number, however, which composes the third description of persons now under our consideration, and which is made up of the enlightened few of all ranks, professions and occupations, the founders and friends of the British Institution must be allowed to form a conspicuous and important part. Conspicuous from their rank and influence in society, and important from their zeal in the cause which they have undertaken, and the advantages to the Arts which it may be expected to produce.

If your exertions, gentlemen, have not been attended with all the good effects which your liberality designed, it must, in a great measure, be attributed to causes, of which, you could not be expected to be perfectly aware: to causes, the existence of which, your own enlightened senti-

ments must have made you particularly slow to believe; and of whose operation to such an extraordinary and unfortunate extent, it perhaps required an unprejudiced trial to establish a sufficiently convincing proof. In furnishing this conviction, however, the experiment which you have made has produced an effect of the highest consequence to the object we have in view. The little sympathy or co-operation which you have experienced from the public, shows, in strong colours, the general insensibility to those interests which you have so liberally undertaken to protect: it evinces the fallacy of an opinion, which is unhappily too prevalent, that the spirit of public encouragement in this country, is the legitimate resource upon which our Arts should depend for cultivation and perfection; and proves, that public munificence, though ready to flow profusely, for other purposes, at the bidding of every projector of the day, cannot, either by persuasion or example, be conducted to the support of an Institution, which has been founded by some of the most eminent characters in the

country, and for purposes the most important and patriotic.

That the powers of the British Institution in their present extent, are inadequate to the attainment of the ends for which it was established, it can hardly be necessary for the author of this letter to state. Your good sense, gentlemen, and recent experience, must have led, before this, to a similar conclusion; and, in expressing my conviction, that without material aid no useful object to the Arts can be obtained by it, which can be considered, in any respect, worthy of your high interference and honorable zeal, I am secure in your liberality, from the imputation of officiousness or offence.

As an Artist, I should blush not to avow my acknowledgments, for the disinterested attention which you have paid to those pursuits upon which every Artist depends: if I did not feel grateful, not only for what you have done, but for what you intended to do. No man can be more sensible of the merit of your past exertions, nor more sanguine as to the result of those, which

I have no doubt, your public spirit and patriotism will, in future, prompt you to undertake.

On those exertions, I do not hesitate to confess, I conceive the last hopes of Art in this country to depend. When the apathy which disgraces other quarters, from which, an effort might justly be expected, is considered, there appears to be no prospect for the Arts, but that, which the zeal and perseverance of your Society afford. To point out, with great deference, and much distrust of my qualification for the task, in what manner, those important agents may be most effectually employed, is the purpose of my present address.

That the natives of these Islands are not disqualified, by constitution or climate, for attaining to excellence in the Arts, is a position, which, the extraordinary efforts of some of our countrymen, even under the most mortifying discouragements, have sufficiently proved. If the higher classes of Art, therefore, have not eminently flourished amongst us, to some other cause than that of incapacity, must it now be ascribed: and as judicious and liberal encourage-

ment has never failed to produce great Artists and great works, in every other country, where it has been employed; to the want of this essential stimulus here, we are warranted in ascribing the deficiency which, in this respect, is so frequently deplored. That this is the true root of the evil, it requires very little investigation to show; and that you, gentlemen, think it is, the exertion which you have made to remove it, affords a very satisfactory proof.

Patronage may be said to be of two kinds; that of the public, as exercised by individuals; and that of the nation, as administered by its government. Without the long application of one, or the other of those stimuli, under the guidance of liberal and enlightened minds, the Arts have never arrived to eminence amongst any people. They have been each employed with admirable effect, in other times and other countries: but where both are wanting, the wonder is, not that the Arts have not flourished in perfection, but that they should exist at all.

The first kind of patronage however, that of the public as distributed by individuals, has

never been sufficient, of itself, to produce the higher excellence of Art in any nation. Bad taste, caprice, and an injudicious interference with the conceptions of genius, must always materially obstruct the advantages to be derived from this kind of encouragement; nor are the subjects and occasions upon which it is commonly exercised, of a nature sufficiently elevating and impressive, to excite all the enthusiasm of the Artist, and call forth all the powers of his art. But whatever good effects may have been derived from this source in other countries, it is obvious, that nothing is to be expected from it here; where, if this stream has flowed at all, it must be now confessed to be dried up. As one great fountain of encouragement, therefore, has totally failed us, it is natural to look to the other; and having no hope of effectual patronage from the public, to solicit that of the State.

That liberal protection from the government is the only effectual stimulus which can now be applied to the powers of taste in this country, I have elsewhere attempted to prove. In this

opinion, I have the good fortune to be supported by the sentiments of so many enlightened Members of your Body,* that I shall add nothing in this place to what has been already advanced in its support.

The extension of this protection to the neglected Arts of our country, it will become your dignity and disinterestedness, gentlemen, to require; and its attainment is, I trust, reserved for your timely interposition to effect.

An application from your Body would be attended with all the grace of liberality, and all

* Mr. THOMAS HOPE, in the preface to his work on *The Costume of the Ancients*, observes:—"In a country, therefore, in which the Arts are not yet become a subject of study as profound as general, historical painting will never flourish to any considerable extent, through the patronage of mere individuals taken singly. It can only thrive through the encouragement of the nation in a body, or through the liberality of the sovereign. And this species of public and national encouragement historical painting has not yet experienced in this country: at least in a mode sufficiently enlarged to produce any very luxuriant or very copious fruits. Neither has the nation yet ordained any historical painting, to commemorate the most glorious achievements: nor has it yet established any condign premium to call forth, to raise and to foster, the genius requisite worthily to represent any such."

the force of patriotism ; seconded by whatever rank and character can bring in aid of common policy and common sense. Few ministers would venture to resist an application for such a purpose, so supported: few would feel a desire to resist it, if they knew, that compliance would cost them so moderate a price. There is no man deserving of the name of Statesman, so lost in political apathy, as not to desire the glory of protecting the Arts of his country, if he could obtain it by so small a sacrifice of his means as that, which will be pointed out in the course of these pages. The most rigid economist of the public resources must blush at the parsimony, as well as the policy, that would withhold what is required. From you, gentlemen, the Minister will learn, with surprise, at how cheap a rate he may share in the honors of a Mæcenas or a Colbert; and he will hasten to pluck a wreath that has never yet graced the brow of a British Statesman.

Your authority has sanctioned the representations of those who have claimed for the declin-

ing Arts, the aid of national munificence.* Your experience can prove how much that aid is now necessary, and your high character will ensure its strict appropriation to the purpose for which it may be granted. Your weight and consequence in society, also, must bear down the petty opposition of official underlings, ever prompt to impede the liberal designs of their superiors, and interpose between merit and its reward.

Already has your example discountenanced that noxious class of critics who delight to calumniate all living talent, and who libel the genius of their country lest they should be ex-

* Amongst those who have endeavoured to awaken the public mind to a just sense of the importance of the fine Arts, Mr. VALENTINE GREENE is entitled to the credit of having been one of the first, the most zealous, and the most disinterested. In a letter to Sir JOSHUA REYNOLDS, published in the year 1782, he has stated some arguments and facts well worthy of attention; and the republication of which, might not, at the present moment, be injudicious.

The author of these pages regrets, that this letter had not fallen under his observation at a time, when he could have gratified himself, by a more conspicuous acknowledgment of Mr. GREENE's early exertions on the subject.

pected to reward it. You have nearly silenced those cold declaimers—those shallow and unfeeling reasoners, who expect the consequence to precede the cause; and who have so often, said insultingly, to the drooping talents of the time, " Let the Arts flourish, and we will patronize them: let the plant put forth its fruit, and we will water it." The duties of a patron have indeed, been so long neglected, that the very name has lost its meaning amongst us. We forget, that the office of the patron is that of a father—a protector —a guardian appointed by taste to the minority of genius—to cherish infant merit to maturity, and foster feebleness to strength.

Patronage of this description (and only this description deserves the name) the Arts have never experienced in this country. There has been nothing paternal in the public feeling towards them: they have been considered as illegitimate children amongst us—deprived of the common portion of respect and prosperity which is bestowed on other pursuits, and left to work their way in society, unaided, unacknowledged, and unregarded.

Among the various causes, which have combined to obstruct our progress in true taste, there is perhaps, none that has operated more effectually, to prevent the exercise of patronage in this wealthy and generous nation, than the prejudices respecting climate. Prejudices set on foot by the arrogance of foreign critics, and established by the affectation of our own. In the antipatriotic zeal of our travelled countrymen, they forgot, that the foggy atmosphere which obscured the faculties of our painters, could not be very favourable to those of our connoisseurs; and that where we cannot hope for the skill to execute, we shall look in vain for the taste to judge.

Those, however, who could be persuaded, that an Englishman was born too far North to succeed in the fine Arts, were not likely to take much pains, or spend much money, to encourage him in a pursuit, for which, they believed him to be physically disqualified. The Arts were considered as exotics, which it was impossible to naturalize; their cultivation, therefore, was neglected as hopeless, without having ever been tried.

Thus, the wealth and liberality, which should have been zealously employed, in calling forth the powers of taste amongst a people distinguished in every other exercise of ingenuity, were turned into a different channel: and, as more eclat was to be obtained, by collecting the pictures of other times and other countries, than by patronizing the painters of our own, the vanity of taste triumphed over the virtue of patriotism.

The tribe of trading connoisseurs did not fail to take advantage of this state of things, and lost no opportunity of strengthening a prejudice so favorable to their operations: till, at length, in the extinction of every feeling that prides in the true glory and permanent reputation of our country, it was considered a disgrace to any collection of celebrity to show a native production upon its walls.

That the Arts should have survived this melancholy period of their depression, may be considered extraordinary; and that we have at length seen, a more liberal sentiment growing towards them in the public mind, must, in a

great measure, be attributed to the influence of the British Institution, and to the patriotic spirit, which gave rise to its establishment.

As your efforts, therefore, have been so far successful, let us hope, Gentlemen, that you will not be discouraged, by the apathy of the public, from completing the work which you have begun. Let us rather hope, that by a new exertion of your influence, in a direction in which it is so much more likely to be effectual, you will persevere, till you have obtained for the Arts, that national protection to which they are justly entitled in every view of utility or glory.

Patronage, liberal, enlightened patronage, is the spring that is wanting to set in motion the powers of genius in this country. A stimulus of this kind, however, it is now vain to expect from the public at large; our manners, our pursuits, our houses, and our habits of life, are all unfavorable to it. The pressure of the times also, renders this species of munificence more rare, while it makes it more necessary. The fortune of an individual, consistent with the prevalent habits of expense, is hardly adequate to

the exercise of any effectual liberality to Arts or Artists: though more is frequently lavished in a contested election, for the chance of a seven years lease of political importance, than would be sufficient, to purchase the immortality of a Mæcenas and the admiration of mankind.

To the timely interference of the government, therefore, we must look, as the only resource of the Arts in their present circumstances; and if their preservation and perfection, be objects of any interest or importance, in a nation of philosophers, moralists and politicians, that resource will not be permitted to fail them.

Taking it for granted then, that, impressed by your judicious representations, the government may not be unwilling to afford the aid in question, it is necessary to consider the extent, to which that aid may be most prudently required; and the manner in which it can be most effectually employed. This will naturally lead to a short examination of the different modes of patronage, with a view to discover that, which may be considered most suitable to the times in which we live. The few reflections, however, which will

be here made, on this subject, it is necessary to observe, are not influenced so much, by considerations of the dignity, as the economy of the state. I do not propose what may become the liberality of a great nation to bestow, but that, which the very existence of the Arts makes it indispensable to receive. If her munificence in this respect, were at all suitable to her rank amongst nations, to her power, her wealth, or her reputation, the national establishments of Great Britain for the cultivation of her Arts, would surpass those of any other age or country.

The Arts, however, have long learned to despair of their ancient privileges: they are more humble in their pretensions, and more moderate in their expectations.

The various modes of encouragement, which, in different countries have been exercised towards the Arts, may be considered under the following heads.

1st. The creation of establishments for their regular cultivation. 2d. The application of a certain sum annually, for the purpose of purchasing, and placing in public galleries, the best

productions of the day. 3d. The employment of selected individuals, for the execution of great works of public ornament and patriotic celebration. 4th. The institution of prizes and public honors, to excite competition and reward excellence.

The first mode is, perhaps, the most expensive, and has always been the least effectual. The second, must necessarily be precarious, is particularly subject to abuse, and would likewise be expensive, if exercised to any liberal extent. The third, is the most splendid, as well as the most extensive; but, unfortunately, at present the most unattainable. The fourth, is not the most certain mode of enriching the Artist, but it appears to be the most efficient mode of advancing the Art.

The erection of an establishment generally exhausts those funds which were destined for its object: it may be said to be a means, which swallows up its end—a machine, which requires so much to put it in motion, that nothing remains for the material upon which it is to work. Unless it is amply endowed and judiciously con-

ducted, it is worse than useless, and promotes vanity and intrigue more than virtue or merit.

In this kind of corporate creation also, a spirit is too often generated, which is as active as it is injurious in its influence. A spirit which perverts all zeal, and disappoints all patriotism. It may be called the establishment spirit. They who are once possessed by it, mistake their duty, and misapply their devotion; they delight in a sort of apparatus perplexity, and are as busy as bees in the bustle of arrangement; but, unfortunately, their cares are not for the honey, but the hive. They transfer their affections at once, from the interest which they should serve, to the instrument by which that service ought to be performed; and, as long as the house can be kept in repair, disregard the state of the inhabitant.

From the prevalence of this spirit, it is, that we behold in the world so many great bodies without souls, existing in all the mockery of animation—absorbing and exhausting the wholesome nutriment of life and strength, in a state of bloated imbecility, and pompous insignificance.

The formation of a new establishment seems also, to be now, quite unnecessary, since those, which we possess at present, are fully adequate to administer whatever aids the policy of government may destine to the Arts.

As it has hitherto existed, the Royal Academy may still continue to exist. The few advantages which its unaided and insufficient means afford, will not be lost to the Art, or the country, for the liberality of its Members will induce them to continue their exertions in its support. A grant to the Academy, therefore, however well merited on the part of that Body, and becoming on the part of the State, forms no feature in the plan of national encouragement, which I shall here venture to suggest.

The same considerations of economy, Gentlemen, which influence me with respect to the Academy, impress me also, with the impolicy of swelling the sum which may be required, by any project of enlarging the frame of the establishment over which you preside. The funds which maintain the British Institution in its present form, will, no doubt, be continued by

the patriotism of its subscribers, and with the more alacrity, when they find, that, by this means, the contribution from the government may be rendered more attainable in its moderation, and more completely applicable to its object.

The machine may therefore, be said to be ready: the wheel moves easily upon its axle; and all that is wanting, is the stream to turn it with effect. We must not, however, expect a river to run for our accommodation; we must endeavour to husband whatever may flow down to us from the great current of national opulence, and increase its force by contracting its channel.

We may confirm, if not justify, the general reluctance to do any thing, by requiring too much. Let us therefore consult rather the wants than the wishes of the Arts; and, in the despair of obtaining that which would be munificent, content ourselves with that which is essential.

There are offices and officers enough, in the British Institution, or the Royal Academy, to manage and administer a degree of patronage,

far superior to that, which the temper of the times authorizes us to expect, or, perhaps, to solicit.

New apartments, or new appointments, new keepers, new secretaries, and new clerks, however desirable, convenient and becoming, would advance us nothing nearer to our object, and would operate very effectually to fritter away the means by which we might expect it to be obtained.

The next mode of encouragement mentioned above, supposes a fund annually supplied, for the purpose of purchasing the best productions of the day, and placing them in national edifices or public galleries. This kind of patronage, exercised with judgment and liberality, would certainly, do much for the advancement of the Arts; although, for several reasons, it does not seem the most eligible which can be at present adopted.

We have, alas! few public edifices or galleries in which these works could be placed with any appropriate effect; and to provide such structures, would require funds which we have had cause to be convinced, it would now be

folly to expect. Even to make these purchases to any stimulating extent, would necessarily be attended with an expenditure, which might be rendered much more effectual if more judiciously applied.

To buy trifling furniture pictures, or pictures not of the higher classes of Art, however excellent in their way, would be not only absurd, but pernicious, as far as relates to the promotion of a more elevated taste in the country: and to bargain and huxter with the necessities of genius; to make him calculate nicely, at how small a rate of remuneration he can contrive to exist by his labours, would be to conduct the patronage of the State in the pitiful spirit of a shopkeeper, and to degrade at once the Art and the country.

We should always keep in view, that to excite the genius of our countrymen to great and noble efforts, is the only object which can make an interference of this sort at all judicious, or justify us in requiring it.

This end can never be promoted by purchasing ordinary, or trifling productions at

low prices. To lay out for such objects the means of patronage, is to lavish them, and to strengthen that tendency of public taste, which has so much obstructed the advancement of superior Art.

This kind of encouragement also, is too precarious as a reward, to be sufficiently powerful as a stimulus. We have already seen, how little, a *chance* of sale, has been able to effect, towards the attainment of the object which we should pursue.*

In times of pressure like these, few Artists of established reputation, who have families to maintain, could prudently undertake the execution of a great work, upon a dependance so uncertain : when, besides the risk of failure, through their own defects, they might, perhaps, have to fear the influence of intrigue, servility, or bad taste. Unless the persons appointed to select the objects of this species of patronage,

* " The finest historical picture," justly remarks Mr. T. HOPE, in the work before quoted, " sold at a price equal to its real value, would precisely be the work of Art likely to hang longest unsold on the walls of the British Gallery."

were endowed with uncommon integrity of judgment, as well as great purity of taste, all the evils of partiality might be expected; and productions of an inferior class of Art, for their excellence in some subordinate qualities, would be preferred to works of genius much more estimable, but not perhaps, so mechanically recommended.

This mode of encouragement, therefore, will not be here advocated; because, in addition to the objections above stated, I conceive, that smaller means than those which would be necessary to give it effect, may be made to operate more powerfully and extensively on the genius of the country.

The third kind of patronage is, the employment of individuals selected for the execution of great works of public ornament and patriotic commemoration. This, is certainly the exercise of patronage, which appears to be most worthy of a great and enlightened people; which is the most splendid and permanent; and which, under judicious management, must always be the most effectual. This, is the patronage, which prin-

cipally contributed to raise the Arts to excellence in Greece, and to revive them to eminence in Italy; which, while it rouses the genius, rewards the virtues of great men, and gives at once refinement to the people and dignity to the State.

Of this exalted kind of patronage, however, there is, unfortunately, at present, no hope. This is not the age in which we can expect the glories of Great Britain to be adequately commemorated. The Art, for all dignified and moral purposes, may be utterly extinguished, before the spirit of taste shall arise amongst us in sufficient strength, to call forth the powers of genius in this way, and bid the temple, the trophy, and triumphal arch, perpetuate the fame of our country.

A Phidias might long look in vain for a temple of Minerva to employ him; and a Raphael and a Michael Angelo would be reduced to exhaust their powers in portraits and petty productions, before a Vatican, or a Sistine chapel could be found, to furnish them with an opportunity of displaying the dignity of

their Art, and celebrating the exploits of their age.*

But even, were there a disposition to exercise this species of patronage in any considerable degree, it is to be feared, there is something in the nature of the times, as well as the taste of the country, which would prevent its operating so powerfully, as might be expected from its effects in former instances. There is reason to apprehend, in the choice of the Artists to be employed, that interest might have more influ-

* Those great Artists were not employed because they had produced great works, but they produced great works because they were employed to produce them. Their fame rests upon exploits of Art, which patronage inspired them to conceive, encouraged them to undertake, and enabled them to accomplish.

That ingenious order of *Graphi-culturists* (if I may be allowed the use of such a word) who expect to reap without sowing, and demand to gather the vintage before they cultivate the vine, should be reminded of this observation. Of all men, the man of genius may be said to be peculiarly the creature of circumstances; his powers expand as they are called forth, and he grows to great occasions. Place him on an elevated stage, and he will act with dignity and effect. Look down upon genius, and he dwindles to a pigmy; look up to him, and he rises to a giant.

ence than taste, and that bustling intrigue might supersede the pretensions of merit. Those, who would be most competent to the occasion, would, probably, be the least forward to solicit it; and we know, by experience, that activity and influence are more than a match for desert.

A Minister of Taste, in this country, would not be less embarrassed in his appointments, than a Minister of State; and the public service might, in the one case, as well as the other, be sacrificed to a powerful application. We possibly, might behold contractors in Arts, as well as in other departments; and national works, intended as an ornament and an honor to the country, converted to a job for its disgrace.

This splendid kind of patronage would seem to require, not only, the taste and liberality of a Pericles, or a Leo, but even their authority; for great works will be projected in vain by those, who have not the power to appoint, as well as the judgment to discover, such persons as are best qualified to execute them.

Patronage on this scale, it is, however, useless to propose, because it is vain to expect it.

Let us rather turn our thoughts to something more attainable, though less magnificent.

The last head of our division, is, the institution of prizes and public honors, to promote competition and reward excellence. This, is a species of incitement, held out to the ambition and love of distinction of a people, which has been resorted to, in some degree, by most enlightened Nations. The ancients, who were particularly skilled in the theory and application of intellectual stimulants, made great use of it, and their practice has been justified by their success. In no subsequent age or nation, have the human faculties been wound up to so high a pitch of enterprize; and much of their superior energy may be justly attributed to the judicious application of this key. Not only, in their general system of education and in their public games, but, as rewards held out to the ambition of their Commanders, their Poets and their Artists, prizes were in frequent use and established estimation.

It is true, those prizes in general, consisted more of honor than profit, because, honor was a

coin amongst them more current and valuable, than it is found to be in modern times. Money was not then the only measure of merit, nor the most certain means of distinction; and he who had once bound his brows with one of their simple but inspiring wreaths, was secure of the respect and admiration of his country.

If the principle of direct competition appears less important as an agent in modern times, it is, because it has not been invested with the same dignity, nor applied with the same discretion; because it has been shorn of its honors in public life, confined to the narrow scale of school-boy ability, or burlesqued in the vulgar contentions of cattle-feeders and flail-makers.

A prize, to be effective as to its object, should be of sufficient importance to rouse into activity all the genius of the department in which it is intended to operate. It should be not only highly useful, but conspicuously honorable. In a degree, it should be, both fortune and fame. So lucrative, and at the same time, so glorious, as to make even the *chance* of obtaining it, more attractive in the eye of genius,

than all the solid certainties of ordinary but less splendid remuneration. Influenced by this principle, the institution of prizes, would be, perhaps, the most powerful stimulus that can be applied to the powers of man.

To the Arts, and especially, to the Arts in this country, this species of patronage seems peculiarly applicable.

The institution of national prizes and public honors, therefore, is the mode which I would take the liberty of offering to your attention, as the most likely, under present circumstances, to call forth the genius of our Painters and cultivate the taste of our country. It is the plan of encouragement which is in its nature, the most comprehensive, and which may be the most readily organized: which every consideration of the temper and the taste of the times, of the state of the Arts, and the talents of our Artists, convinces me, would be the most effectual in its operation, and the most attainable as to its means.

In the cursory view here taken, of these different modes of national patronage, the merits of that which I have been induced to recommend,

are not so much considered absolutely, as relatively to the state of public feeling and liberality on this subject. All the modes above mentioned, are good in their way, when exercised with judgment and generosity; and a liberal and enlightened government would occasionally, resort to each, as situations and circumstances required.

The preference given to the last mode, results from a consideration of its economy, as well as its efficacy; from a conviction, that it is the machine, for our purpose, which is the best calculated to local circumstances; which can be worked at the least expense, and which produces the greatest effects with the smallest means.

The same sum, which, expended in commissions, would be little more than sufficient, to remunerate liberally, one Artist, for a single production of importance, may be made to set in motion all the genius of the day, if offered as a national prize; conferred with some striking solemnity, and accompanied with some flattering testimonials of public honor and estimation.

Supposing, therefore, that the species of patronage here recommended, should be deemed advisable in our present circumstances; it remains to be considered, in what manner, the institution of prizes and public honors should be regulated; and how far, the economical management of moderate means may be made efficient to the production of a powerful stimulus to the Arts.

This question requires the proposition of some specific plan, and, therefore, naturally leads to the developement of that, which I shall now respectfully submit to your consideration, and which, it is the object of these pages to introduce.

It is necessary to repeat, however, that it is not a project of national splendor or princely munificence, which I am about to unfold. I do not pretend to concert a scheme of imperial patronage, which in the eyes of our neighbours and rivals, shall appear worthy of emulation, or commensurate to the interests, the dignity and the glory of Great Britain. It is useless to flatter our imaginations with visions of liberality

and magnificence, which, from the character of the times, we can entertain no reasonable hope to see realized.

I merely propose to show, that much may be done at a comparatively small expense; that our Arts may be preserved without much injury to our finances; and that those guardians of the public weal, who shall turn a deaf ear to their remonstrances, will find no excuse for their want of wisdom, liberality and patriotism, in a consideration of the magnitude of the means which they require.

I propose, that the sum of five thousand pounds be annually appropriated by government, to the encouragement of the Arts; under the management of the President and Directors of the British Institution.

This sum, as it is annually received, to be immediately placed in the funds; and, at the end of every third year, the whole, with the interest, to be applied as a provision for carrying into execution the following plan:—

1. *National Prizes to be instituted for the Encouragement of the higher Department of Painting and the Cultivation of a more elevated Taste in the Arts.*

2. These Prizes to be divided into three classes, and decreed with public solemnity, every third year.

3. The first class, to consist of three prizes, and to be appropriated to those, who, by a noble application of their powers, shall most successfully promote the cause of religion and morality; stimulate the growth of public virtue, and commemorate the glories of our country.

4. The second class, to consist also of three prizes, and to be devoted to subjects drawn from ancient history, poetry, or romance, less extensive, or on a smaller scale.

5. The third class, to consist of three prizes; to be of a more miscellaneous character than the

foregoing, but still to be limited to such subjects as usually come under the description of historical Art.

6. The subjects of the first class to be chosen by the Artists themselves, from Sacred or British History; each picture to consist of at least, thirteen figures, the size of life; and no picture to exceed the dimensions of the cartoons of Raphael at Hampton Court.

7. The first prize of the first class, to be three thousand pounds; the second prize, two thousand; and the third prize, one thousand pounds.

8. The subjects of the second class to be chosen also, by the Artists who are to execute them; each picture to consist of at least seven figures, the size of life; and if on a smaller scale, to contain not less than thirteen figures. No picture of this class, to be under the dimensions of the well known picture of the Death of Wolfe by the President, West.

9. The first prize of the second class, to be fifteen hundred pounds; the second Prize, one thousand; and the third prize, seven hundred and fifty pounds.

10. The subjects of the third class, to be chosen by the Artists themselves, but within the limitation before specified. The pictures to be unrestricted as to number of figures, this class being intended to embrace all such productions of the pencil, whether consisting of one figure or more,* which in point of size or subject cannot properly be put in competition with those of the other classes. No picture in this class to be of smaller dimensions than those of the Sacraments, by Pousin.

11. The first prize of the third class to be seven hundred and fifty pounds; the second prize, five hundred; and the third prize, three hundred pounds.

* Such pictures, for instance, as the Ugolino, of Reynolds; the Bard, from Gray, by West; the Venus and Adonis, by Titian; the Night-mare, of Fuzeli; Prince Arthur and Hubert, by Northcote; the Tragic Muse, by Reynolds, &c.

12. A remuneration of five hundred pounds, to be granted to each of the three candidates of the first class, who shall be judged to be the most deserving of those who shall have failed to obtain a prize in that class.

13. A remuneration of three hundred pounds, to be granted to each of the three candidates of the second class, who shall be judged the most deserving of those who shall have failed to obtain a prize in that class.

14. A remuneration of one hundred and fifty pounds, to be granted to each of the three candidates of the third class, who shall be judged the most deserving of those who shall have failed of obtaining a prize in that class.

15. The pictures, which shall have obtained prizes, to become the property of the nation, and to be presented as an honorable decoration, to some of our churches, palaces, or public halls.

16. The pictures, which shall have obtained the first prizes, to be placed, if possible, in some conspicuous station in the metropolis :* some of the others to be occasionally, presented to the public halls of our principal corporate towns, to excite emulation in the provinces, and promote a taste for the Arts in the country.

17. The pictures, which shall not have obtained prizes, to remain at the disposal of the Artists by whom they shall have been painted.

18. All the works, painted in concurrence for the national prizes, to be publicly exhibited, in the rooms of the British Gallery, at the usual price of admission, for two months; one month before, and one month after, the adjudication of the prizes.

* These works, where they cannot be placed with any striking propriety or public impression, may be considered as deposited pro tempore, and held as a reserve to be removed at any time, when the munificence and public spirit of the Government, shall be willing to provide for them a situation more suitable to the importance of the Arts and the dignity and glory of the empire.

19. The profits of the exhibition to be divided amongst those Artists who shall not have obtained a prize, or a remuneration, in such proportions, as may appear the best calculated to reimburse them for the expense of their frames and materials. Provided, that such proportions shall not exceed, one hundred and fifty pounds to a candidate of the first class; one hundred to a candidate of the second; and fifty pounds to a candidate of the third class.

20. A committee of the Directors of the British Institution, assisted by a committee of the Royal Academy, to examine all the works offered for the triennial prizes; and no picture to be received, which shall be deemed unworthy to concur in this great national contention.

21. No production, which shall be considered to have an immoral tendency, however skilfully executed, to be received in any class; and no Painter to be, on any account, admitted as a candidate for a national prize, who shall be known to have at any time, disgraced the character of

an Artist, and perverted the powers of his Art, by applying them to such pernicious subjects.

22. No picture to be received, which shall have been painted before the public notification of the institution of the national prizes; and no alteration or repainting of a picture previously painted, to be considered as sufficient to preclude the application of this rule.

23. The national prizes to be open to all Artists, without distinction of rank, or country, who shall have been, during three years preceding the triennial adjudication, established residents in any part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

24. Every Artist, who proposes to concur for the national prizes, to give notice in writing to the Directors of the British Institution, at least eighteen months preceding the period of adjudication; in which notice, he shall specify, in what class he desires to become a candidate.

A few observations, explanatory of the principles upon which the preceding part of the plan has been regulated, may, perhaps, be here necessary. First, as to the period of granting the national prizes; 2d. as to the subjects for which they should be granted; and, 3d. the amount of each prize.

If the prizes were to be decreed annually or biennially, they must, with the same means, be materially diminished in value, and consequently much less powerful in effect. Their frequent recurrence would weaken their influence in their familiarity, and hasty productions would be the fruit of inadequate rewards.

The parsimonious profits and heavy expenses of the British Artist, have made it impossible for him to devote that time and attention to the completion of his works, which even the brightest genius of the Greeks, surrounded with all the inspiring circumstances of his age, found it necessary to employ. No man can now afford to dwell upon his work long enough for its perfection, and he suits it therefore, to the emergency and the remuneration. Unless we change our

practice in this respect; unless we determine to depend more on profound study, than on prompt execution, and prefer the mature results of patient application, to the flimsy products of superficial facility; we shall in vain aspire to rival those ancient miracles of taste, which we know to have been the joint result of the most extraordinary stimuli, acting upon the most exalted powers and the most unwearied industry.

The national prizes, therefore, are here made triennial, that they may be the more important; that the interval may occasion them to be looked to with more interest; and that the ceremonial attending their adjudication, by being less frequent, may be made more dignified, and more likely to produce a powerful impression on the public, the Artist, and the Art. In this interval, also, the Artist, without entirely laying aside his ordinary and more certain resources, will have ample time to put forth all his powers, and in a deliberate, well-studied composition, do honor to himself and his country.

The subjects for which the prizes should be granted, are divided into three classes; of which,

those from Bible and British history constitute the first. This arrangement has been adopted because, I conceive, that the interests of religion, morality and patriotism, should be the primary objects in all national institutions of this kind: and the patronage of the Arts is a duty of government principally, as they tend to promote these great ends. It is true, that the subjects of the other classes may be, and ought to be always made instrumental to such important purposes; but, as some gradation appeared expedient in the amount of the prizes, and also in the size of the pictures, the preference has been given to subjects more directly sacred and patriotic, and more strikingly impressive upon our concerns, as Christians and as Britons.

The choice of his subject, under the regulations attached to the class in which he desires to distinguish himself, is left to the Painter; because he is the best judge of that which is adapted to his particular powers; because he will always labour with more ardour on a subject which he has himself selected; and because there is often as much merit in the choice

of a subject as in its execution. There will be always points of comparison sufficient to produce a decisive judgment, without shackling the Artist of genius, where, perhaps, it is most essential that he should be free: without compelling all the candidates to toil upon a subject, to which perhaps, they feel no attraction, and which may have been chosen without any consideration of their peculiar powers, or even any sufficient attention to the powers of their Art.

The pictures of the first class are required to be large, and to contain at least a given number of figures. Because, the grand style of Art demands space and magnitude; and because, this style of Art, which is by far the most worthy of attention, is but little cultivated amongst us, and therefore ought to be the more particularly encouraged.

The size of the cartoons has been stated as the largest limit, because it is fully adequate to the display of every exertion of ambition or ability, which can be required on such an occasion; and also, because it may prevent any attempt to attract by extraordinary magnitude,

that attention which could not be hoped from pre-eminent merit.

The regulations proposed on this subject, are calculated to leave the Artist as much latitude as possible, consistent with the necessity of proportioning the effort to the prize. Though it would be absurd to shackle him in a precise stipulation of feet and inches, yet some general rule, within which, he may accommodate his peculiar conception of his subject, is absolutely necessary.

The regulations respecting the pictures of the second class, are intended to include those works, which, though not equal in grandeur of subject, character, or size, to those of the first class, are yet highly worthy of reward, adapted to produce great moral effects, and capable of great excellence.

The third class is proposed as an incentive to early ability,—as a first flight for youthful genius, before he has become sufficiently confident in the vigor of his wing to venture into those elevated regions of exertion to which it is our object to allure him. In aspiring to

the proud eminence of Roman Art, as displayed in the great works of Raphael and Michael Angelo, it is necessary that humbler efforts should be cheered and encouraged; as a means of exercising the powers of the Artist, and fitting them for those nobler tasks which will be hereafter required of him.

The miscellaneous character of this class also, would furnish an opportunity of encouraging a variety of productions, which, though not admissible in the rank of more important objects, are yet calculated to display the most conspicuous powers; and which, as they shall be increased and dispersed through the country, cannot fail to become a powerful means of promoting a general taste for the fine Arts.

The amount of the prizes has been dictated by a principle before discussed; a principle which teaches, that to be effectual, a prize must be important, and sufficient to rouse the best exertions of those upon whom it is intended to operate. Three thousand pounds, however, will probably be thought a large sum for this purpose, in a country, where as many hundreds

have been commonly considered as an ample remuneration, for any work of modern Art.

The very proposition of such a reward may possibly, excite surprise in some characters. "Three thousand pounds for a modern work!" exclaims, here, the simple collector, who, perhaps, has just poured double that amount into the pocket of some crafty trader in virtu, for a precious relic of the old masters. "Three thousand pounds!!!" echoes the sagacious picture dealer, who, in the just repute and remuneration of modern genius, anticipates the downfal of his hopes and the discomfiture of his operations. "Three thousand pounds!!!" exclaims even the spiritless Artist, who, measuring the value of his Art by his own imbecility, sinks submissively to the low level of his deserts; and, because he is incapable of the effort, is confounded at the prize.

They who consider a picture as a piece of furniture, must be expected to pay the Painter as they would the upholsterer; but if we are desirous to raise the Arts amongst us, to that rank, which the great and wise of all enlight-

ened ages have agreed to confer upon them; if we would exalt ourselves in their protection, rather than degrade ourselves in their degradation, we must adopt a different measure of their utility, and a more liberal standard of their reward.

A little reflection, however, will, I trust, show to those, who do not consider the Artist as a mere mechanic, that the scale of prizes here adopted, is not only not extravagant, but that one less liberal, would be less politic, and, as to any great national purpose, totally inefficacious.

It is as absurd, as it is unjust, to expect that great exertions will be made, unless for great rewards. Honor and profit, are the powerful springs of enterprise amongst men: and as there is no career more arduous than that of the Arts, so there is none in which the influence of those agents is more essential. How little they have been resorted to for the encouragement of genius in this country, it is needless to enlarge upon here. The state of the public taste, and the total suppression of all effort or emulation in the higher department of Art, sufficiently

prove it. Mean and parsimonious, however, as are the profits of the historical Artist, that consideration alone, would not be sufficient to drive him from his course, if it were cheered by any hope of public honor or estimation.

Of all professional men, the Painter of genius, is, perhaps, the least mercenary: his studies and his habits of life give him a disrelish for expensive pleasures, and he considers money, only as a necessary means of comfort and consideration. I have that confidence in the liberal spirit of my profession, that I am convinced, its most distinguished members could be well content to live poor, if they could but hope to live respected. But they know and feel, that their estimation in society depends not on the merit which they display, but the money which it procures them.

> " Nil habet infelix paupertas durius in se,
> Quam quod ridiculos homines facit."

Amongst us, perhaps, more than any other civilized people, it may be said, " There is no virtue in a threadbare cloak :" and after the fate

of Barry, a second enthusiast will not readily be found, to devote himself to poverty and the contempt which it breeds, from the desire of doing honor to a country, which has neither the liberality to reward, nor the taste to appreciate, his exertions.

If we desire to promote a respect for the Arts in the public mind, we must make those who are distinguished in them respectable. We must not reward a man of genius like a mechanic; nor press him down penuriously from that sphere of life, in which it is the interest of society that he should move.

To maintain, with a family, this respectable station, the most economical establishment which can be formed (consistent with the necessary means of professional accommodation) requires at present, one thousand pounds per year. This may be said to be the minimum of remuneration which an able Artist's labours ought to procure for him: and while he *can* labour, he may with prudence *live* upon this income. An emolument of this kind, however, though it may be called payment, has certainly no preten-

sions to be considered encouragement to genius. This degree of reward, nevertheless, has been adopted as the basis upon which the amount of the national prizes has been regulated.

If the ordinary annual income of an able Artist, at the lowest rate of respectable remuneration, should be one thousand pounds, we may assume, that, for the labour of a similar period, an extraordinary *commission* given by the nation, should be at least double that sum. And if a national commission, in which the reward is certain on the completion of the work, should be two thousand pounds, for the product of one year's application, it follows, that a stimulus offered in the name of the State, and of so precarious a nature as a *prize*, should be considerably more than that sum, and ought not to be less than three thousand pounds, to constitute it either an effectual incentive or a liberal national reward.

Let it be remembered, that the object to be encouraged, is not the trifling production of a day—got up with the *hey presto* of polygraphic facility, to catch, in transient exhibi-

tion, the eye of some callow amateur, who is desirous, at a small expense, to acquire the reputation of a patron; but a work of grand character, and on an extensive scale; calculated to produce moral and patriotic effects; such as may do honor to our age and country; requiring deep thought, long preparation, and deliberate execution. Upon such a work, an Apelles, or a Protogenes, might perhaps employ ten years, or even a life; and it is seriously to be hoped, that no British Artist will presume to undertake such a work, without resolving to devote at least *one* year to its completion.

He who flatters himself, that in less than that period he could complete a production on this scale worthy of the occasion, or calculated to do honor to his country, has a higher opinion of himself than he has of his Art; and the offspring will be in proportion to the period of gestation.

For an effort of this magnitude, can it be thought too much, that a man of genius, after one, two, or perhaps three years' arduous and anxious application, should have a *chance* of

obtaining three thousand pounds? We must reflect, that it is for the *chance* of obtaining this prize that the Artist labours; and he should be rewarded not only in proportion to his merit, but his risk.

For an ordinary or insignificant prize, no Painter of ability or eminence can be expected to hazard his time, or his reputation. The object of its institution, therefore, would be wholly frustrated, and the genius of the country disgraced, by the imbecile efforts of half-formed students and incompetent professors.

If we compare the prizes here proposed to be offered to the Artist, with the remuneration of eminent talents in other professions, neither more honorable nor more arduous, we shall find still less reason to consider them as extravagant.

Leaving out of the question the high dignities within his grasp, how is the distinguished lawyer rewarded? how is the skilful physician recompensed? how is the great actor, the great singer, or even the agile dancer, requited for the superior exercise of his powers?

Let it not be imagined, however, that I am one of those weak and illiberal reasoners, who would deprive those latter characters of their just appreciation, or who grudge to them that affluence which they extort from those who endeavour to degrade their talents, while they enjoy them. Genius is the rare diamond of mind, which a truly civilized people will ever set in their estimation beyond the cut-glass of ordinary intellect. I would not lower the great Actor, the Singer or the Dancer, in the scale of public opinion; but I would place the great Artist, who is so much their superior in his functions, somewhat more nearly upon a level with them in his reward.

I may be told, perhaps, that the characters I have mentioned, derive their incomes from the public at large, and do not require in their favor the particular interference of the State.

To this, it may be answered, that the popularity of their talents, and the mode of their remuneration, make all such interference unnecessary. Their commodities are in general demand, and all orders of the community unite

for their encouragement. The public have a taste for law, and a taste for physic, a taste for acting, for singing, and for dancing ; but, unluckily, they have no taste for the fine Arts : and as this is precisely the taste, which, except the taste for literature, conduces the most to the interest, the honor, and the immortality of a people, an enlightened government will feel it a duty, to provide those means for its cultivation, which an unenlightened public (in this respect) refuse.*

In an unprejudiced consideration of those remarks, the amount of the first prize will, I

* To this interference in their favor, the Artists of England have no ordinary claim. While they have been neglected themselves, they have endeavoured to protect the taste of their country. Above eighty thousand pounds, produced during forty years by their united exertions, they have disinterestedly devoted to the support of an Establishment, which has disseminated improvement through every channel of ornamental manufacture: an Establishment, which reflects honor on the Empire in foreign States, which they believe to be nationally and munificently endowed; and which, if it has failed to effect all that could be performed by such an Institution, the cause is to be looked for, not in the insufficiency of its Members, but the inadequacy of its means.

trust, be fully justified; and the proportions of the rest may be said to follow of course.

It may not be amiss, however, to account for that part of the plan which proposes to grant remuneration to some of the most meritorious candidates of the three classes, who shall have failed of obtaining a prize; and which divides amongst all the candidates, except those who shall have obtained prizes or remunerations, the profits which may arise from the public exhibition of their pictures.

One of the greatest obstacles to the advancement of superior Art in this country, arises from the difficulty which the Artist finds, to provide the materials necessary for his studies, and maintain himself and his family, during the time, which a great exertion requires. If his zeal and his enthusiasm tempt him to *one* experiment of ambition, he is sure never to repeat it; for he finds, that all the success he can hope for, amounts neither to fame nor to fortune, and that failure is ruin, as well as disgrace. In alluring him, therefore, to an enter-

prise so hazardous, it seems reasonable to ensure to him, that if his efforts are found to evince respectable ability, he will not be left entirely without reward, nor be exposed, by his honorable ambition, to a loss of time and reputation, which he may never be able to repair.

With this view, therefore, the remunerations have been proposed and proportioned to the different degrees of exertion which the different classes require.

In this part of the plan, the Artist will perceive some provision against the possibility of failure in his higher hopes. He will discover some reasonable probability, that, if he be not enriched, he will not be ruined by his ambition: and when to this advantage, is added the chance of finding a purchaser for his picture, even at the humblest price, he will not consider a contention for the national prizes, though at the sacrifice of one, or even two years' industry, so desperate a speculation as it would otherwise appear to him.

According to this arrangement, nine Artists would receive liberal and honorable prizes; nine

more would be consoled with some compensation for their time and their disappointment; and the rest of the candidates, if not more numerous than can be at present supposed, or the necessary previous examination should admit, would, in their portion of the exhibition profits, be in some degree reimbursed for their frames and their expenses.*

Thus far, we have discussed that part of the plan, which relates to its operation in a pecuniary view. How much of public honor and distinction can be devised, to give additional

* It will be perceived, that in the present plan, those works only are considered, which fall under the description of historical Art. If, however, the author has not proposed prizes for portraits, landscapes, familiar scenes, and other subordinate subjects, it has not proceeded from any want of respect for these interesting departments of taste, in one of which he is himself wholly engaged; but from a conviction, that their interests would be sufficiently provided for, in the protection and prosperity of the great stock of Art, from which all the dependant branches must derive vigour and luxuriance. The public also seem adequate to the cultivation of those pursuits; they employ them to a considerable extent at present; and they would encourage them liberally, if a judicious example of national patronage were to be furnished by the State.

point and relish to the grosser stimulants of interest, remains now to be considered.

To encourage a belief, that money alone is sufficient to reward the higher and nobler exploits of the human intellect, is to degrade the man of genius to a vulgar mercenary, who performs for pay, that, which only the pleasures of fame and the prospect of immortality can adequately remunerate. Withhold from the skilful Artist these testimonials of public estimation, which, in all enlightened societies, he has been accustomed to receive, and you break down the only spring of his exertions which can make him worthy, even of the coarser reward you may be willing to bestow upon him. He who would rather be paid than respected, will be patronized in vain.

Under this impression, therefore, it appears advisable, that every means of adding honor, as well as profit, to the attainment of a national prize, should be solicitously adopted, not only, as an incentive to the Artist, but also, to excite in the public mind some idea of the utility of his functions and the value of his Art.

For this purpose then, it is proposed, that the triennial ceremony of adjudication should be invested with all the dignity and solemnity which can give it eclat or effect throughout the country.

The decision of the judges to be declared by the President, at a public meeting, in the rooms of the British Institution. Upon which occasion, the Officers of State, the Lord Mayor of London, the President and Members of the Royal Academy, the heads of all the great bodies, and every nobleman and gentleman distinguished for a love of the Arts, should be invited to attend.

The successful candidates to be introduced to the President of the British Institution, and each to receive from his hand, a rich gold medal, struck for the purpose, with an appropriate inscription, specifying the class in which it had been obtained, and whether for the first, second, or third prize. The medal to be worn on all public occasions.

The pictures for which, prizes shall have been adjudged, to be publicly crowned, and to

remain so distinguished, during the subsequent month of exhibition.

Many other modes of operating upon the love of glory, which particularly characterizes that class of men who are occupied in the pursuits of genius, might here be easily suggested: but, notwithstanding the enormous prices which have been paid in this country, for some of the pictures of the old masters, there is amongst us so little general respect for the Art itself, and so much indifference as to its interests, that, to propose any additional stimuli of this kind, would be considered, chivalrous, romantic, or perhaps ridiculous, in an age, when such feathers of distinction are disused or disregarded in the general desire of incentives more solid and essential.

If, however, some gracious mark of attention could be obtained, for those who distinguish themselves in this arduous and honorable contest, from the royal and revered Patron of the British Institution, or, if the medals could be conferred, as a condescending and inspiring testimonial of encouragement from that august

quarter, every thing, in the way of honor and distinction, might, perhaps, be said to be secured, which the nature of the case, and our cold anti-enthusiastic manners, will admit of.

A difficulty of no small moment, in the execution of this plan, will, doubtless, Gentlemen, have occurred to you,—the mode of adjudication: and you will naturally require the statement of such regulations respecting it, as may promise to secure, as far as possible, enlightened judgment and inflexible impartiality in a decision so important to the interests of genius.

From this difficulty, however, there is no mode of national patronage exempt; and, in the present mode, it may perhaps, be most successfully encountered.

It will be readily admitted by candid and reflecting minds, that to form a complete judgment in Art, the practical experience of the professor should be united to the theoretic science of the connoisseur. To weigh accurately and dispassionately, through all the relations of subject, conception, composition and execution, the respective merits of works which

approach nearly to an equipoise of pretensions, demands, perhaps, the steadiest hand of justice and the nicest scales of taste.

A tribunal which should have to pronounce judgment in this great cause, involving, not only the fame and fortune of individuals, but, as far as relates to the Arts, the character of the nation itself, ought to be constructed with some attention, and composed of such persons as are not only conspicuous for their knowledge of Art, but capable of distrusting and desirous of assisting that knowledge. They who believe themselves to be perfectly competent to the performance of such a duty, are perhaps, the last persons that should be appointed to it; for confidence springs not from the extent of our knowledge, but from the narrowness of our views; and he who thinks he knows every thing, is probably, the man who will be found to know the least to any useful purpose. From the undivided responsibility of an award so delicate, every man of honor and sensibility will shrink, who is not convinced that he possesses all the qualities of taste in a degree, very rarely to be found amongst either Artists or Connoisseurs.

To adopt a process of adjudication, which might tend in a considerable degree, to combine the critical competence of both those characters, must, however, be considered as a point of vital importance; for one injudicious, or partial decision, would discourage the hopes and damp the ardour of genius. He would turn with disgust from the anxious toil of a contest, in which, his honor and his interest were to be left at the mercy of those, who had proved themselves unqualified to decide upon them.

Though the final decision, therefore, should necessarily rest with those persons whom you may think proper to appoint for the purpose, yet, your liberality of sentiment and eager solicitude for the interests which depend upon that decision, will prompt you, not only to accept of, but to require, every aid and assistance which professional experience can afford.

To provide then and employ this assistance, as far as may be consistent with the privilege entrusted to the umpires of the British Institution, and to collect the voices of the most conspicuous organs of taste in the country, I would suggest, that, previously to your final decree,

the judgments of the three following parties be, if possible, obtained, and delivered in writing, with the reasons upon which they may have been founded.

First; the judgment of a committee of the Royal Academy, consisting of all the Members of that Body who may not be candidates. Secondly, the judgment of a committee of the Dilettanti Society: and, lastly, the judgment of the candidates themselves; a mode of decision resorted to by the ancients on some very important occasions, and which might be very easily methodized.

From some favorable notice in one or more of these decisions, no work of conspicuous merit could possibly, by want of taste or integrity, be excluded. Where the three parties agreed, the judges appointed by your Body, would have the gratification of confirming a decision which must be just, to be so general; and where they disagreed, your judges would have an opportunity of selecting from the productions recommended, those works, which a farther investigation of their merits, and the

more mature estimate of general criticism, might convince them were the most worthy of success.

By publishing, on the day of final adjudication, the several decisions here proposed to be obtained, the public would be enabled to form an opinion of the justice or injustice of the result. By the reasons assigned in those decisions, the public taste could not fail to be directed and enlightened; and the candidates themselves, would be improved by observing for what qualities their more successful rivals were preferred.

By these means, a judgment might be produced, as nearly perfect, as perhaps, the prejudices and passions of human nature can authorize us to expect. A judgment which would satisfy the public as to its purity, and the profession as to its taste: in which, the fortunate would feel a double victory, and even the unsuccessful could find no room for discontent.

How far the stimulants here proposed, would operate to revive the ancient vigour of Art amongst us, it is perhaps, difficult to anticipate; and their proposer will probably, be thought the person least competent to determine. I

should imagine, however, that what there may be of Artist-like feeling, or generous emulation amongst us, would be roused by them; and that if there should be found a Painter of any repute, so lost in mercenary occupation, as to decline a contest so honorable, it must proceed only from the want of ambition or the consciousness of inability.

From the immediate operation of this plan, however, or even of the most judicious and liberal plan which can be devised, too much should not be expected. Though more, much more would be done than the common appreciation of the genius of the day amongst our critics, would lead us to believe, yet, it is probable, that miracles might not be immediately performed. The culture must be patient and persevering, if the crop is expected to be luxuriant: And although the first growth might appear inadequate to the expense, that is no reason, why the husbandry should be discontinued, nor why a richer harvest may not be hereafter produced.

The influence of these stimulants should be considered, as applying to the rising race, as

well as to the present race of Artists. We must view them not only, in relation to the genius which they may reward, but to the genius which they may generate. How would the idea of such a triennial celebration work upon the ambition of a youth destined to the pursuits of Art! with what different feelings from those which now actuate him, would he labour in a career, thus opened to elevated hopes and inspiring objects; thus cheered by liberal reward and honorable estimation!

If there be genius in the country, capable of transmitting the glories of Great Britain with honor to posterity, patronage, even upon this contracted scale, cannot fail to call it forth. If, indeed, there be not genius in the country, no patronage will be sufficient to produce it: but, let us not countenance this slanderous supposition, till we have made at least *one* experiment to prove it. Let us not condemn those who have the virtue and the valour of the Greeks, as incapable of acquiring their taste, till we have furnished them with the motive, the means, and the opportunity.

Let us now compare the amount of the prizes, and remunerations above specified, with the means by which we have supposed that amount to be supplied.

FIRST CLASS OF PRIZES.

First Prize	£3000	0	0	£6000
Second Prize	2000	0	0	
Third Prize	1000	0	0	

SECOND CLASS OF PRIZES.

First Prize	£1500	0	0	£3250
Second Prize	1000	0	0	
Third Prize	750	0	0	

THIRD CLASS OF PRIZES.

First Prize	£750	0	0	£1550
Second Prize	500	0	0	
Third Prize	300	0	0	

Total Prizes £10800

Brought forward.....					£10800
Three remunerations in the first Class.....	£500	£1500	0	0	
Three ditto in the second Class	300	900	0	0	2850
Three ditto in the third Class	150	450	0	0	
Total.....					£13650

To meet this expense, it has been proposed, that five thousand pounds should be annually placed in the funds, and at the end of every three years appropriated, with the interest which may have accrued during that period. This annual sum, at the end of three years, with the interest, would amount, in round numbers, to £16500 0 0

Deduct from this sum the expenses above stated 13650 0 0

Balance..... £2850 0 0

This sum of two thousand eight hundred and fifty pounds, I should propose to be applied according to the discretion of the Directors of the British Institution, in aid of the general purposes of that Establishment; first, deducting such part of it, as may be sufficient to provide the gold medals for the successful candidates; to pay the expenses of the grand triennial exhibi-

tion, and to remunerate the officers and servants of the Institution for whatever services the execution of the plan might require of them.

You have now, Gentlemen, before you, a rough and hasty outline of the plan, to which I have presumed to solicit your attention. A plan, founded not upon a liberal consideration of what might be done, or perhaps, ought to be done, by the richest and most powerful people upon earth, for the protection of those Arts which adorn and dignify human society; but calculated to render, in some degree, available to this great end, such contracted means as it may not be quite hopeless to solicit in times like these, from the parsimonious policy of the State.

A variety of considerations might here be added, still farther illustrative of the advantages which would probably flow from the measure recommended, if the reasonable limits of this address, or the circumstances in which it has been written, would permit.*

* That so little encouragement has been extended to the Arts, by the people of this country, is to be attributed, not so much to a deficiency of means, or a defect of liberality,

Enough, however, has been already said to explain the nature of my proposition, if it be of any value; and if it be not, to say more would be only a waste of words.

The plan, nearly as it is now brought forward, was formed shortly after the establishment of the British Institution. It was then laid aside, from a distrust of its merits, and from a reluctance to be thought busy or importunate, where others might have been expected, with more propriety to lead. It also, seemed ungracious, to disturb with doubts the public hopes, on the

as to the inadequate impression of their value which prevails amongst us. How can the public consider the Arts as national objects, when they behold them neglected and despised by those, who are especially appointed to be the guardians and promoters of all national interests?

The liberal spirit of British merchants has long and justly been the theme of panegyric; and it must be confessed, that if they pursue wealth with more enterprise and activity than the traders of most other nations, they also disperse it with more generosity. If, by the judicious interference of Government, in setting an example of attention and protection to the Arts, a just sense of their importance were once excited in the minds of this powerful and respectable class of society, a resource for the genius of the country, far superior to any thing which can be found in the history of Venetian patronage, would be secured in their public spirit and munificence.

formation of a new establishment, or to agitate another scheme of patronage, before that which had been so recently adopted could be tried.

Having, at a meeting of the Council of the Royal Academy,* which occurred in August last, thrown out a slight idea of the plan, though upon a much smaller scale, the effect which, even in that state of contraction, it was thought, by some Members, capable of producing, revived in me once more, the desire of offering it to your consideration.

That a better plan might easily be formed, I am very willing to believe; but, unfortunately, they who are more competent, are less zealous, or perhaps more prudent; and, although the necessity of forming some specific scheme has always been urged, as an indispensable preliminary to any application for aid, which the friends of Art might be induced to undertake,

* A meeting, called for the purpose of considering a proposition for the encouragement of historical Art, brought forward by Mr. Flaxman, whose zeal, public spirit and disinterestedness, I am happy to have this opportunity of acknowledging.

yet none appears to have been hitherto brought forward.*

If the measure here stated should be deemed injudicious, or inapplicable to this end, it may, perhaps, arouse some more skilful projector to improve upon its suggestions, or to supersede them by his own. The subject once abroad, and it cannot fail to be agitated to some purpose: and if good shall in any way, result from my endeavours, I shall be content, whether their operation be as a warning or a guide.

In thus, however, stepping out from the silent and submissive ranks of my profession, I may possibly subject myself to some misrepresentation, and perhaps to some malignity. I am well aware, that they who are so *indiscreet* as to obtrude themselves in matters of this sort, will, like Polonius,

"Find that to be busy is some danger."

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* This observation must be understood, as relating only to a recent period. Several years ago, propositions for the national patronage of the Arts were zealously agitated by the late Mr. Opie, Mr. Flaxman, and others.

The fate of us meddlers has always been, to be sneered at as officious, to be suspected as designing, or to be cavilled at as absurd. This consideration, as far as it relates to the individual, is not worth a thought; but it is often of serious consequence to the object which he endeavours to advocate. It alarms the diffidence and sensibility of those who are, perhaps, the best qualified " to do the State some service." The suggestions of zeal are suppressed in the policy of indifference, and the duty of exertion is left (as in the present instance) to be performed by those, who, if they have more activity, have less strength.

Above all things, I would entreat every friend of the Arts, to be cautious, how he gives ear to those cold dampers of public spirit—those dwellers in doubts and difficulties, who lie like stumbling-blocks in the path of enterprise, and are never so pleased as when they can impede his progress and baffle his hopes.

Of this description, there are many in every sphere of life ; but in the province of taste they abound. From them, the present plan can look

for no support. Some will condemn it, because they had no concern in it: some, because there can be no job in it—because it goes directly to its object—creates no snug places, and, consequently, leaves no room for intrigue. Some will disapprove of it as doing too little; others again, as doing too much. Objections may perhaps start up in quarters where they might be the least expected; and it is not impossible that even some Artists may dislike, a scheme which holds out no advantages but those, which are to be obtained by great exertion and great merit.

There may possibly be Painters, who have no relish for competition, and who would be better pleased to see government dealing out large commissions, in which the reward at least, would be certain, however unskilful or disgraceful the work. Such persons, however, if there are such, must not be allowed to discredit their more able and honorable brethren, who desire no rewards but those which they may be found to deserve; who wish for nothing more than an opportunity of generous emulation, and are

willing to adopt, as the motto of their fortune and their fame,

"Palmam qui meruit ferat."

It must always be the interest, and I am convinced it is the inclination, of eminent Artists, to discourage every thing of a mercenary or mechanical character, in the exercise of an Art so noble as that which they pursue; and the manner in which the principle of direct competition obviously operates to produce this effect, forms one of the motives for particularly recommending it.

It is desirable that the genius of the country should have a fair, public and honorable trial, before it can be discredited by an injudicious or corrupt choice of those who may be appointed to furnish the world with examples of it: before the liberality of some future Pericles shall set on foot public works, to be undertaken perhaps, in the spirit of a contract, and executed in the spirit of a tradesman.

In thus enlarging upon the advantages which might be expected from the plan here

proposed, I beg to assure you, Gentlemen, that I am little actuated, either by the partiality of the parent, or the pride of the projector. I do not profess to be a very dexterous artificer in this way; nor have I been tempted to try my hand at an operation so much out of my line, without being aware that many marks of awkwardness and inexperience must be discerned in it.

What I expect, or even desire from my plan, is not so much, that it shall be approved or adopted, as that it may be the means of suggesting a better; that, by shewing to those who materially over-rate the resources which any respectable effort of national patronage requires, how much might be effected by the direct application of moderate means, it may perhaps, stimulate the disposition to solicit those means, and excite a disposition to grant them.

Personally, few Painters can be less interested than I am in the success of what I propose. Wholly engaged in a pursuit of Art which claims no particular protection, and which the public sufficiently employ, I can have

but little prospect of successfully devoting myself to those nobler toils of taste which I have here attempted to recommend. But, even, should ambition prompt me to enter the lists on an occasion similar to that which I have supposed, I do not so ill measure my pretensions with those of my brother Artists, as to flatter myself, that, in a contest so arduous and so inspiring, I should carry off those laurels, which it would be much to my honor or my interest to wear. I hope, however, that I am capable of taking some pleasure in the triumph of the Arts, even though I should not be so fortunate as to be one of the principal figures in the procession.

You, Gentlemen, will, I am satisfied, interpret my intentions with candour, and receive this long address with indulgence. The observations which it contains, can derive no weight from the name that is to be attached to them ; the plan which they recommend will, therefore, rest as it ought to rest, on its own merits. Should you consider it as capable, under any modification, of being made available to the end in view,

your public spirit will induce you to act upon its suggestions, and your influence must enable you to accomplish them.

In your past services, you may be said to stand pledged to the Arts, and to your Country, for the attainment of those objects, which are not more necessary to the protection of the one, than to the reputation of the other. And with the highest sense of your zeal, your liberality and your patriotism, as well as the most sanguine hopes of the result which their combined operation must produce,

I have the honor to subscribe myself,

Most respectfully,

Your obedient humble Servant,

MARTIN ARCHER SHEE.

CAVENDISH SQUARE,
October 2, 1809.